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SEP 29 2010



Vol. 131, No. 20 95¢ + GST

Little Current, Ontario

Wednesday, September 29, 2010



Some chinook salmon are getting stranded on the beach at Providence Bay before they can spawn, as the entrance to the Mindemoya River is plugged with sand. Manitoulin Streams has put forward a plan to free the blockage from the river mouth.

Plan in works to free up passage at mouth of Mindemoya River to aid spawning fish

by Jim Moodie
PROVIDENCE BAY—Salmon are now knocking at the door of the Mindemoya River but many are locked out due to a buildup of sand.

To address that problem, the Manitoulin Streams organization has applied for permission to dig

out the obstruction at the river's mouth, and is eagerly awaiting a green light from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to insert its spade.

"The sooner the better," said MaryEllen Shain, media coordinator with Manitoulin Streams, "because fish are being stranded

already."
Jack Hicks of Providence Bay has been monitoring the situation daily, as conditions change depending on the volume of water coming down the river and the amount of wave action in the bay, but it's clear that something needs to be done, as "sand builds up at the mouth of the stream and it gets diverted in different directions," said Ms. Shain. "And the beach keeps getting more extended."

abrupt change of heart. Their one-eighty was critical to the demise of the legislation: the final vote on a Liberal motion to kill C-391 was a nail-biting 153-151.

Bill Elliott, a sport shooter and firearms safety instructor on

Glen McDougall, a director with the river rehab group as well as a Prov resident, said some people are fishing for salmon right now, and he worries that fish that are caught and released won't be able to make their way inland to spawn. "If the stream isn't open,

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Police who shot Byron Debassige tell inquest they would do it again

Sister of slain 'lemon thief' frustrated by answers so far

by Jim Moodie
TORONTO—Angie Assinewe is hoping that testimony heard this week at a coroner's inquest into her half-brother's death will shed more light on the tragedy than the rote explanations provided last week by Toronto police.

In 2008, a drunken Byron Debassige, who counts family in M'Chigeeng, was shot in the chest by two constables in Oriole Park after stealing lemons from a store on Yonge Street. Last week, both policemen maintained that they took appropriate actions, as the 28-year-old was wielding a knife and making an aggressive motion toward them.

Ms. Assinewe believes her sibling was more of a drunken fool than an actual threat to anyone's safety, however, and can believe that there wasn't a better, non-lethal tactic the police could have employed to subdue him, particularly since Mr. Debassige also had mental health condition and his only weapon consisted of a folding knife with a three-inch blade.

"It was a pretty rough week, just hearing the police saying how they would do it all again, and sticking to their story," said Ms. Assinewe the weekend. "I wish the courtroom could have been packed because there would have been so much outrage."

Ms. Assinewe attended each day of the inquest's first week, with father Ken Assinewe—the parent she shares with Byron—was present for most of the deliberations as well. The Assinewes live in Toronto but count Sagamok as their tribal home.

Unfortunately, Mr. Debassige's mother, Jennifene, didn't live long enough to take in the inquest, which has the potential to provide some solace to the family as well as prevent future tragedies of this nature through its recommendations. Ms. Debassige passed away a year ago part from the stress of losing her son. She was 49.



Byron Debassige

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MP's yea for gun registry draws mixed response among Islanders

by Jim Moodie
MANITOULIN—The latest Conservative bid to scrap the long-gun registry might have been officially scotched, but debate on the issue has not gone away, nor is Carol Hughes's about-face likely to be forgotten when Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing voters make their next trip to the ballot box.

Just how much the MP will be haunted by her pro-registry shift is debatable—Ms. Hughes has impressed many during her rookie term through her work ethic and frequent presence in the riding, and there are many who also applaud her decision to preserve the firearms framework—but it seems safe to say she's lost a few fans after flip-flopping on Bill C-391.

Last November, Ms. Hughes voted with 11 other New Democrats to send the anti-registry bill past second reading. On Wednesday of last week, she was among four Northern NDPers who, along with Liberal Anthony Rota of Nipissing-Timiskaming, had an

Islanders join rally for equity in First Nation education

by Lindsay Kelly
OTTAWA—The federal government must create fairness amongst First Nations communities when it comes to gaps in education, says the national chief.

Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn (A-in-chut) Atleo spoke plainly at a rally last Thursday when he called for Canadians to support their First Nations neighbours in lobbying for greater funding for education on reserves across the country.

Thousands of First Nations citizens, including a contingent of Island youth, descended on Parliament Hill in Ottawa last week for an education rally



Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo addresses youth from across Ontario who gathered at Parliament Hill in Ottawa last Thursday to discuss education issues and demand accountability from government.

designed to get the message across to the federal approach to education flawed, and First Nations citizens losing out.

The rally kicked off with a walk that began at Victoria Hill and proceeded to the parliament buildings, where First Nations citizens were joined by representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

"We have gathered to unite our voices as one and to call on the government of Canada to provide First Nations with a guarantee that ensures First Nations

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...Plan in works to free up fish passage at Mindemoya River mouth

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they get washed up on shore, and they're done," he said.

While the recent deluge of rain helped to boost the river's flow and keep the channel open, that's no guarantee that the passage won't get blocked off again. "Sandbars can form overnight," noted Mr. McDougall.

Ms. Shain said that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has already given its blessings to the excavation proposal, so it's just a matter now of getting MNR approval. She expects this shouldn't be a problem, as disruption to the landscape will be minimal.

"We're not touching any vegetation, and only looking at digging out a metre or two of sand," she said. "It's not really excavating, because there's no chipping things away. We would just be moving sand aside."

Central Manitoulin supports the proposal and has okayed the use of township equipment to carry out the work. "We would use a small, rubber-tired backhoe, and be in and out real quick," said Mr. McDougall. "We won't be leaking oil all over the place, and all you need out of there is a few bucketfuls. Once you get a small hole, it won't belong before the river's eating its way through."

The dredging is seen as a temporary solution to the chronic silting of the mouth, which can be more permanently addressed through rehabilitation projects to narrow the river and stabilize its banks. "This is a short-term strategy to create that passageway," said Ms. Shain. "But the reason there is so little force to the river is that it is a lot wider upstream, so the long-term solution is to finish our restoration."

One rehabilitation project was undertaken on the Mindemoya River this summer under the banner of Manitoulin Streams, and more areas are identified for enhancements over the next few years, including a section near the mouth.

It's a plan that's generally popular among residents of the area, as such work not only benefits the fishery but also bolsters the property of riparian dwellers.

"I'm in favour of it," said Merdick McFarlane, whose land borders the river.

"At one time this was quite a salmon and trout stream, and there was a deep hole off the corner of my property where you could see them spawning, but you only see a fraction as many now."

With the fluctuations in the river level due to rain and releases from the dam at Lake Mindemoya, the shoreline can also take a beating, he said, so anything that would help to stabilize and protect the banks would be welcome.

"I've lost 13 feet of property over the years," he said. "I can tell because there used to be a survey stake that was 10 feet back from the river, and now it's underwater."

Apart from losing land, Mr. McFarlane has also lost some valuable trees. "I had to cut down some mature oaks that were 20 to 24 inches on the butt because they were threatening to fall in the river," he said. "If the bank had stayed stable, those trees would still be here."

The impact of the flow in his location is particularly noticeable, he said, since he's just downstream of a culvert, which means the water comes through with extra force when the river is running high.

Anglers have also contributed the problem over the years, though, by trampling on the banks to reach fishing holes. "That fishing activity causes the bank to erode, too," said Mr. McFarlane. "And the more sand that goes in the river, the more it will plug up at the mouth."

Mr. McDougall recalls a time, back in the early 1980s, when 70 or 80 boats would be visible in the bay when the salmon started to run, and fishermen would be lined up elbow to elbow along the riverbanks.

The mouth would occasionally get plugged up with sand in those days, too, but local residents would simply grab a few shovels and dig out a fish passage by hand.

There was something of an attempt at a structural solution, too. "About 20 years ago the township put some rocks down, and that did help for a bit," said Mr. McDougall. "Those rocks are still in there somewhere,

but now you can't see them. They're buried under sand."

As frustrating as the ongoing problem may be, Mr. McDougall said that Manitoulin Streams recognizes that "we have to be cautious in what we do," given that the site is ecologically sensitive and any shoreline alteration is closely analyzed by the MNR, with few in-water projects approved.

Needless to say, there is no plan to build up a pair of cement walls at the river entrance, but there is the hope that the MNR will grant approval for a period of at least five years for the organization to dig out the sand as required, so that an application doesn't need to be submitted each time the blockage occurs.

"This has been an ongoing thing, and it rears its head every year at this time," said Mr. McDougall. "The river itself is a contentious issue, with the amount coming through the dam, but the MNR out of Espanola is mandated to look after human safety and property values and maintain a good level in Lake Mindemoya."

That responsibility once fell to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), with whom Mr. McDougall works, but it was never a role that was particularly enjoyed. He recalls a supervisor being quite relieved "when he didn't have to be in charge of the crank anymore."

That's because whatever decision is made regarding the flow of water, someone is bound to be upset. Even on Lake Mindemoya there is a range of opinion regarding what constitutes a suitable level, noted Mr. McDougall, while below the dam both landowners and anglers have strong feelings of their own.

"It's a tough call for those MNR guys," he said. "When the water's high, like now, you can probably let a half-log out in a week's time, but if it's low and you put a log in the dam, you choke off the fish, and leave the eggs high and dry."

Since the amount of precipitation can never be counted upon, and the needs of cottagers and residents on Lake Mindemoya will always be a factor, the best way to protect the river is to continue with the series of rehabilitation projects that has been outlined by the stream improvement group, in Mr. McDougall's view.

The payoff won't be instant, but the dividends will be reaped for years to come. "It's going to take five years for us to turn this around," he said.

The enhancements will not be "for the salmon alone," emphasized the Streams director. Rainbows and steelhead come up the river too, as do a few brown trout, and the spinoffs for the local community stand to be considerable if the fishery for all of these species can be revived.

"When the salmon were really going here, those fishermen left a lot of money on Manitoulin," said Mr. McDougall. The steelhead run, which happens in November, was once so alluring that some folks who came to hunt for deer were inclined to exchange their guns for fishing rods, he added.

The most pressing issue, though, is to ensure that the chinooks that are currently making their way into Providence Bay don't encounter an impassable speed bump at the threshold of their spawning grounds.

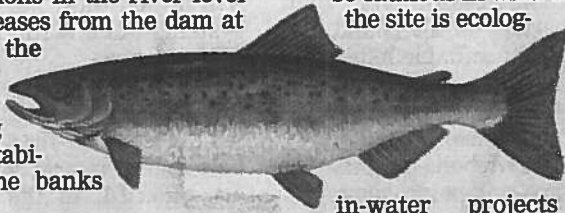
If they can't get in, they'll spawn along the shore of the bay, where "there isn't a good success rate at all" for the eggs to survive, said Mr. McDougall.

The river itself may not be perfect, but at least has a few cool pockets with gravelly bottoms where fish can still deposit their eggs and die knowing that there's a good chance they'll hatch.

A female salmon can lay as many as 2,000 eggs, noted Mr. McDougall, but only 5 percent of those typically hatch in a wild setting.

Given that ratio, it's a real shame if even seven or eight fish get stymied at the mouth of the river and die on the beach, before even getting a chance to reproduce.

"We'd like to get as many up the river as we can," said Mr. McDougall.



Ecologically sensitive and any shoreline alteration is closely analyzed by the MNR, with few in-water projects approved.



Crowe's Corner

Is your furnace ready for winter?

MANITOULIN - Hey folks. Wow! It's like someone threw a switch and turned off summer. Reminds me of when I was a kid and winter was approaching. My dad said "you had better put your bicycle away or it will end up getting snowed on and ruined". "Yeah, yeah," I would say and totally forget about it. Then, come spring time, there is the bike. All rusty, chain seized, seat ripped and torn and generally destroyed, all because I never did what I said I was going to do. So, do you think the old man was willing to buy me a new bike? Not a chance. "You said you would take care of it when I bought it for you. You had your chance to honour your word and you didn't, so now you are on your own." I had to scrimp and save to get a bike on my own. Lesson learned. Now, fast forward a few years, well, quite a few and the lesson my dad taught me is fresh in my mind again. If you don't do what you say you are going to do, then you must face the consequences of your actions. With that said, we all have things that need to be done before the onset of winter. Bikes, patio furniture lawn-

mowers and all the do-dads that we use during the warm months need a little TLC before they are stowed away for the cold months. And conversely there are things that we use during winter that need to taken out and dusted off before they are put to use. Keep this in mind the first time you fire up your furnace to take the chill off this fall. With the coming winter and the need for your furnace to be working everyday you should extend some of that TLC in the direction of your home's best friend. A simple cleaning and check-up can assure you of many days of trouble-free operation. How painless is that? You call me up and say "Jeff, I need my furnace looked after." My response? "No problem. I will have Andy and/or Kyle stop in and fix you up." Simple. Now with brothers Andy and Kyle on the job you can rest assured that Manitoulin Fuels will give you the peace of mind that comes with knowing your furnace will be in top shape for the season. And if you do fire it up and need some help, our guys will do everything within their power to get you going and to keep you going. You have always trusted the supply. Now, you can trust the service. Top quality service from Manitoulin Fuels. I wonder if one of them will lend me a bicycle?

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